Sport Leadership Assessment/Reflection Assignment

Introduction

Leadership is not something a person automatically gains just because they wear a coach's jersey or a captain's band. In sports, leadership is more like the glue that holds everything together and the spark that helps push things along. Whether leadership happens on the court, during the game, or behind the scenes, it plays an important role in bringing a group of individuals to work as one. As noted by Welty Peachey et al. (2014), sports leadership is not just about who holds the title. It's an important element that influences how players act, what attitudes they have, and how they conduct themselves during their activities. The goal of this essay is to discuss leadership theories that are relevant, compare them with how sports actually work in real life, analyze John Maxwell's ideas on leadership, and finally offer some suggestions for improving sports leaders.

Leadership Theories in Sports

Leadership theories offer ideas or frameworks that explain how leaders should behave, guide others, and succeed. In sports, these leadership theories are important, and several of them are worth mentioning.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership works by encouraging and inspiring athletes. It's about getting them to push beyond their usual limits and focus on a shared vision and mission. According to Welty Peachey et al. (2014), there is a link between transformational leadership, athlete satisfaction, and team commitment. A coach using this kind of leadership focuses on team values, in a way that helps each player buy into something bigger than themselves. That vision can move the group forward, even if some players don't fully understand why they're doing it. This approach can raise overall satisfaction, but it also adds pressure to the team's unity and sense of shared goals. Sometimes, it's unclear how much it really affects the individual player.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership focuses more on the players themselves—their growth and well-being. A leader's role is to serve and put this development first, which can be especially important in some situations. This type of leadership, as described in *Leadership Assessment (2).pdf*, highlights traits like empathy and stewardship. Coaches who lead by serving, by assisting and supporting their players, tend to create environments where trust and loyalty grow over time. This long-term commitment often leads to a more united team. However, this player-focused approach doesn't always bring immediate results. Sometimes the balance between caring for players and focusing on team success can feel uneven. Still, it plays a key role in keeping the team together.

Situational Leadership

This theory explains that leadership styles should be adjusted based on the readiness and skills of the athletes involved. A coach might take a stricter, more direct approach with less experienced players. But as those players improve, the coach can shift to a more supportive, nurturing style, allowing players more freedom to make decisions for themselves.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership works through rewards and punishments. While it's not as popular today, it remains effective when clear expectations and discipline are necessary to keep things running smoothly. Even though it may seem outdated, this simple system of reward and consequence still works in specific situations.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leaders are known for being honest and consistent, with values that are clear and dependable. These leaders build trust by sticking to their principles and behaving predictably. This reliability makes athletes feel more secure and comfortable, giving them space to express themselves. Under such leadership, athletes are more likely to grow, share, and improve.

Practical Applications of Leadership in Sports

Leadership theories may sound good in theory or on paper, but the real test comes in practice—especially under pressure, like during a game. Leadership ideas and concepts don't mean much if they only exist in debates or books. It's real-life situations, especially when things are going wrong and quick decisions are needed, that show whether these leadership theories are useful or just words. Game day, or any high-pressure moment, is the true test of a leader's abilities. Without the ability to perform under those conditions, theory doesn't count for much. Leadership, in sports or elsewhere, reveals its true power when time is short, and the stakes are high.

Building a Positive Team Culture

Transformational and servant leadership both help build team cultures where athletes feel valued and part of something bigger. These approaches promote open communication and respect. When such leadership is present, athletes are motivated and encouraged in different ways. Coaches often set the tone by creating an environment of mutual respect. Open communication is key to making athletes feel they belong.

Motivating Athletes

A leader motivates athletes by building relationships and recognizing every contribution, no matter how small. Maxwell's principle of influence is often mentioned here because personal interactions make people feel noticed. A simple fist bump can show appreciation. One-on-one conversations or recognizing a player at practice can go a long way toward motivation. These small, repeated actions can add up to a lot in keeping the team engaged and focused.

Effective Communication

Good communication is essential to making sure everyone understands their roles and expectations. When leaders speak clearly and directly, they make sure everyone knows what to do. Sometimes instructions must be specific; other times, there's room for flexibility. Leaders must decide what works best at the moment. Clear communication leads to better understanding, which helps the team function smoothly.

Conflict Resolution

Real leaders step in to handle conflicts honestly and with compassion. They don't ignore problems. They address them openly and in person. Leaders who are authentic encourage others to speak up without fear of backlash. This builds trust and allows honest conversations. In the best cases, no one holds back out of fear, and the team can work through issues together.

Decision-Making

Leaders often need to make decisions under pressure, which can be tough. Transactional leadership can offer structure and consistency, while transformational leadership helps ensure decisions stay true to the team's values.

John Maxwell's "Developing the Leader Within You" Assessment

John Maxwell's leadership ideas focus on influence, which is the key. His five levels of leadership—Position, Permission, Production, People Development, and Pinnacle—outline the steps of leadership growth. Each level builds on the last.

Key Principles

- Influence is more important than authority.
- A leader must change themselves before they can change others.

- Leadership doesn’t happen by accident but by choice.

Integration into Sports Leadership

Maxwell’s principles closely align with transformational leadership. Coaches who build relationships and focus on developing people leave a lasting impact. Maxwell emphasizes doing things with purpose. Influence isn’t automatic; it takes effort and intentional actions every day.

Personal Reflection

In my Leadership Assessment, I found I lean toward transformational leadership, with some servant leadership mixed in. Maxwell’s ideas confirmed my strength in building relationships. One area I need to improve is People Development. I often focus on team performance (Production), but I need to invest more in helping individual players grow as leaders—not just focusing on results.

Integrating Theory with Practice: Case Studies and Examples

Case Study 1: Gregg Popovich (NBA Coach)
Popovich is often seen as a transformational and servant leader. He puts his players’ well-being first and focuses on building strong team relationships. His team-first approach helped the Spurs succeed for many years. Though his expectations are high, he balances them with caution, which is a common trait of transformational leadership.

Case Study 2: Dawn Staley (NCAA Women's Basketball Coach)
Staley’s leadership is authentic, based on honesty and transparency. She empowers her athletes on and off the court. The culture she builds is responsible and respectful, and she works hard to instill these values in her team.

Common Challenges and Solutions

Burnout

Burnout is reported to be prevented by empowering assistants and building shared duty leadership. Some believe that if leaders do that, the problem of burnout would be easier to manage. There are different opinions about how to do it. Servant leadership is commonly quoted as a solution to it, but how much it really does in every case is debatable. Others suggest building a culture of shared responsibility and, according to them, this would seem to it that there is no burnout. But not everybody believes so, and its effectiveness may also be based on how it is embraced and whether everyone subscribes to it.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is common. Transformational leaders try to overcome it by sharing a clear vision of the future and involving others in the process. Whether this reduces resistance for everyone is unclear, but it can help.

Recommendations for Developing Effective Sport Leadership

Continuous Learning

Leaders should always keep learning about leadership theory and practice. Reading books like Maxwell's or attending workshops can help. A leader's development should never stop.

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs are valuable for passing on knowledge and preparing future leaders. Planning for future leadership is just as important as leading today.

Diversity and Inclusion

Leaders must work to create inclusive environments where all athletes feel heard and valued. It takes effort and commitment to make everyone feel they belong, but it's essential.

Leveraging Technology

Using technology and data can help teams make better decisions. While the impact isn't always clear, data-driven choices tend to be more informed and can lead to better results.

Conclusion

Leadership in sports matters. It makes the difference between teams that show up and teams that succeed. Leadership theories like transformational, servant, situational, and transactional leadership offer different playbooks. Maxwell's principles remind us that influence is at the heart of leadership. Coaches who blend theory with practice and focus on developing others can build teams that succeed on and off the field.

References

Maxwell, J. C. (2018). *Developing the leader within you 2.0.* HarperCollins Leadership.

Welty Peachey, J., Zhou, Y., Damon, Z., & Burton, L. (2014). Forty years of leadership research in sport management: A review, synthesis, and conceptual framework. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(5), 570-587.

Leadership Assessment (2).pdf